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ABSTRACT

The present paper, part of a larger study of family day care, examines providers' perceptions of themselves in relation to their work roles. Perceptions of self as mother, as teacher, and as business owner/operator are analyzed within a theoretial framework including the constructs of self-concept and role conflict. Participants, 10 family day care providers residing in Oregon's Willamette valley, were interviewed and observed between October, 1986 and May, 1988. Providers' perceptions of self in terms of work role were revealed as the women shared their life stories and discussed their beliefs about children and child care. Concepts of role were also inferred from the caregivers' interactions with children and parents, motives for becoming a provider, choices pertaining to planning and implementation activities, short- and long-term goals, and general attitudes toward the profession. Findings indicated that providers whose concepts of their work role were influenced by their identity as a mother experienced a minimum of conflict and strain and derived satisfaction and fulfillment from their work. Results suggest that some providers experience ambivalence toward work roles and that the implementation of teaching and/or business owner and operator roles can be problematic for providers. Implications of the findings are pointed out for the design and delivery of provider training and support programs. (RH)

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PROVIDERS' ROLE PERCEPTIONS AND THE DESIGN AND DELIVERY OF FAMILY DAY CARE SERVICES

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Abstract

Role perceptions, a prominent theme which emerged from a qualitative study of family day care providers, are discussed in this article. Providers' perceptions of self as mother, as teacher, and as business owner/operator are analyzed within a theoretical framework of self-concept and role conflict. Providers whose concepts of work role were influenced by their identity as a mother experienced a minimum of conflict and strain. Furthermore, they realized satisfaction and fulfillment from their work. Results of the study suggest that ambivalence toward work roles can be experienced by some family day care providers and the implementation of teaching and/or business owner and operator roles can be problematic for providers.

Providers' role perceptions and their interpretations of caregiving practices have implications for the design and delivery of effective training and support programs for family day care providers. The complexity and challenge of assuming multiple roles, in light of providers' self-concepts and experience, must be acknowledged by educators and human service professionals as they work to improve the quality of family day care and the lives of the providers.

Providers' Role Perceptions and the Design and Delivery of Family Day Care Services

Introduction

One of the oldest and most widely used forms of child care in the United States is family day care (Fosberg, Singer, Goodson et al.,1981). Distinguished from care that is provided in day care centers, in preschool or nursery school facilities, and substitute care that is provided in the child's home by a non-relative, family day care is generally defined as child care for up to six children in the home of the provider. Despite the extensive use of family day care arrangements and its importance as a network of out-of-home care for children, comprehensive information about family day care is not available. Although it is losing some of its invisibility, repeatedly the literature will begin with demographic information that indicates the scope of the service and then lament the fact that a narrow base of research exists (Goelman, 1986; Pettygrove, Whitebook, & Weir, 1984; Rubin, 1975).

Within the limited research on family day care in general, relatively little attention is given to the provider (Benson, 1985; Wattenberg, 1977). Rubin (1975) pointed out that there "has been a dearth of knowledge about the identity of providers, the nature of care they offer, and the needs and aims of family day care providers as they perceive them". The lack of clear information about providers' perceptions of their work, of children, and other aspects of their lives was also noted by Kontos (1988).

The National Day Care Home Study (Singer et al.,1980), one project which did devote some attention to the providers, sought to develop a "unified portrait" of the caregiver (Vol. II, p. 137). Information regarding background characteristics (age, education, marital status and income) was combined with caregiver opinions and attitudes toward children and child rearing practices

as the authors sought to present a more comprehensive picture of the caregivers in family day care homes. The perceptions that the providers held regarding job, status and their role in the community were also analyzed in this study.

Although this study and several others (Abbott-Shim & Kaufman, 1986; Innis & Innis, 1984; Kontos, 1988; Rubin, 1975) are helpful in understanding family day care providers, these women remain relatively unknown, misunderstood and unappreciated. Considering that the provider is "the central figure in family day care" (Fosberg et al., 1981, p. 137) and the "key to the quality of the child's experience" (Rodriguez & Hignet, 1976, p. 20), and that comprehensive information is lacking, extensive study of family day care providers is certainly warranted. The development of informed and effective ways to support family day care providers and ensure quality experiences for children in family day care homes rests with our understanding of these women and their work.

The present paper, part of a larger study of family day care, examines providers' perceptions of themselves in relation to their work roles. Role perceptions, one of the prominent themes or motifs which emerged from the study, are analyzed in the context of caregiving practices.

The theoretical frame of reference for the paper is taken from the literature on self-concept and role theory. Role perceptions are considered to be part of a larger construct of self-concept. Utilizing aspects of self-concept theory presented by Snygg and Combs (1949) and Mead (1934), self-concept is perceived as the essence of an individual's own view of self. This "phenomenal self. . . is the point of reference for his every behavior" (Snygg and Combs, p. 78). Many ideas and perceptions constitute the phenomenal self which must be studied from the point of view of the perceiving individual. Pointing out that the phenomenal self is a product of the culture, Snygg and Combs add that definitions of self are influenced by the values and moral concepts of our culture. This process emphasizes the individual-society relationship, and can be linked to the symbolic

interaction approach advanced by Mead. His view assumes that one's conception of self evolves within the framework of social experience. As a member of a community, an individual finds definition of self through shared meanings and values. As individuals we give unique expression to those attitudes as we integrate the responses of other human beings into the formulation of a sense of self. This approach considers the individual to be an integral part of the social process which contributes to the individual's self-concept while it simultaneously is shaped by that individual.

The concept of role theory also contributes to the theoretical framework of the paper. Although theoretical formulations pertaining to role analysis cover a broad range of issues and the body of knowledge in the field is large, Biddle and Thomas (1966) offer a perspective that is useful and relevant. In identifying characteristics of the field, they include the relationship of immediate and past influences on the real-life behaviors of individuals. Among these influences are the perceptions and behaviors of others, the position which the person holds within a social structure and the individual's understanding of and reaction to these factors (p. 17). In dealing with the concept of role conflict, Biddle (1986) points out that conflict can develop between the two roles a person is expected to fulfill. Furthermore, conflicts can also arise when there is discrepancy between an individual's expectations in terms of role enactment and expectations of other people. Goode (1960) has noted that role strain inevitably results when multiple roles must be assumed. When an individual is placed in a position to assume multiple roles, eventually some will be honored at the expense of others, frequently as a result of a shortage of time.

The interactionist and the phenomonological approach served as a theoretical framework for the development of self-concept and theories of role conflict and strain were helpful in the analysis of providers' perceptions of self related to their work. All data were examined with an emphasis on the interactive nature of role perceptions and daily caregiving practices.

Method

Qualitative research identifies the tradition in which the study is embedded. Jacob (1988, 1989) argues that qualitative research is more than one approach. She uses the concept of tradition to emphasize the importance of underlying assumptions, central questions, appropriate methods and analytical techniques in choosing an approach to research. Beliefs about the nature of human behavior, what is worthy of study, who can best teach us about a phenomena and how subsequent discoveries and understandings will be communicated, direct a researcher to go about the process in certain ways. The method which was chosen for this study facilitates the examination of a context-bound, process-oriented, social phenomena. It directs the focus to the family day care providers who are the main source of understanding and worthy teachers of the subjective meaning that child care holds for them. It is their voices and their lives which can tell the true story of family day care.

The goal of the study was to discover the multiple realities of family day care and seek a better understanding of the meaning that this work holds for the women who are engaged in it. The study was not conceived or designed to test a particular hypothesis or make predictions to a larger population. Rather, my intent was to observe and describe experiences and analyze them in ways that might help understand the phenomena.

Qualitative research for the study of child care is not only indicated by the nature of the phenomena and the assumptions of the researcher. As a method, it has the potential for answering relevant questions in a manner that is understandable and useful to practitioners (Porter, 1982). In the present project, ten family day care providers joined me in a shared teaching/learning experience. The result was research that was meaningful to them--in its process and in its outcome.

Interviewing and participant observation, two central techniques of qualitative research, were the primary means of

gathering data. Each of the ten participants was interviewed in her home. All of the interviews were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were designed to be open-ended and unstructured. Resembling a "guided conversation", (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p.12) the focus of the interview was maintained by the use of a series of prepared questions. Questions covered the following categories; childhood and family of origin, educational experiences, initial motivation and early involvement in family day care, details of daily life and work relationships, decision making processes (pertaining to the delivery of child care services) and attitudes toward the profession.

The conversational mode which was used may have contributed to the trust, confidence and level of comfort that characterized the interviews. Lofland and Lofland (1984) point out that the elements of every day conversational interactions seem to communicate understanding and empathy and a type of support. Indications of this type of response were evident in the openness of the providers and expansiveness of their dialogues. They repeatedly made comments such as "You are easy to talk to and I could talk to you all day." Often they followed me to the car, with one last story to tell.

Observations took place in each provider's home while children were present. The time of day and length of observation varied systematically across cases and within each case. Time and length were chosen to maximize the scope of data and observe the entire day. As the study progressed, observations at specific times became advantageous as they made it possible to observe certain activities, e.g. morning "school time".

Participants and Time Frame

The participants in the study are 10 family day care providers who live in the mid-Willamette valley of Oregon. When the study began in the fall of 1986, nine of the providers were registered with the Children Services Division. As a registered operator of a family day care home, each of these individuals had attended an orientation, been informed of basic guidelines

regarding numbers of children in care, and passed a criminal records check. The tenth provider was not affiliated with any state or local agency.

Seven of the 10 participants belong to the Red Cross Child Care Referral Program and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Child Care Food Program. After paying an annual fee, participants in the referral program are placed on a list which is shared with families seeking child care. Providers who participate in the USDA Food Program receive federal funds to help cover the cost of food for the children in attendance.

Interviews and participant observations took place between October, 1986 and May, 1988. The number of children present during the observations varied among providers. In one situation only one child was present and in another 12 children were in attendance. This latter observation took place in one of two homes which changed from family to group home status during the 18 month period of the study. Changes also occurred in the status of several other providers. One of the participants got out of the business of family day care. One provider reduced the number of children in care to two since she and her husband became foster parents of three preschool children. Thus, over the period of the study, 6 of the 10 participants continued as family day care providers per se.

In terms of experience, living situations and education, the providers represent a diverse group. Ranging in age from 31 to 58 years, some have preschool children at home and others are grandmothers. Seven of the providers live with their husbands and children, one lives with her husband, one is divorced, and one is single.

The providers' range of educational experience is broad. One of the women has a bachelor of arts degree and three have taken classes at the university or community college. Of the remaining six providers, three completed high school, one received a GED, and two of the participants dropped out of high school in the tenth grade. The participants have worked in family day care for as few as 2.5 years and as many as 18 years.

Discoveries

One of the most salient themes which emerged from the study was the providers' perceptions of self in terms of work role. These were made visible as the women shared their life stories and discussed their beliefs about children and child care. Concepts of role were also inferred from the caregivers' interactions with children and parents, motives for becoming a provider, choices pertaining to the planning and implementation of activities, short- and long-term goals, and general attitudes toward the profession.

Although the distinctions cannot be absolutely defined, providers' perceptions of self are placed in the categories of provider as mother, provider as teacher, and provider as the owner/administrator of a business. A discussion of these themes includes a focus on the lives and work of several of the providers in the study. Their voices and behaviors are believed to be the most telling in terms of role perceptions and the most useful in explaining the delivery of child care services. In keeping with the goal to report research in ways which are understandable and useful to practitioners, the findings are presented in a descriptive, expository style, weaving analysis and interpretation throughout the discussion.

Clearly the most frequently expressed perception of self related to work role was that of mother. Although this definition did not always appear as a singular concept, it was used most often to describe how the women viewed themselves in relation to work.

Judy, a woman in her mid 30s, is the mother of two children, ages 8 and 11. A provider for eight years, she spoke about "being like a mom to these kids," and "raising the children while parents sit back." She added, "I feel like a mother figure to them all." During one observation, she asked a child to "bring mom, I mean Judy, a kleenex", and told a child "to let mom (meaning herself) do it." One cannot infer

that she necessarily sees herself as a replacement for the child's mother. It is, however, likely that the general sense of self is defined within the parameters of motherhood and her role as a family day care provider is an opportunity to express this aspect of her self-concept.

As a caregiver, she defines her responsibility in terms of "being there". Being there means being available, being watchful, being protective, being emotionally involved with the child. Being there and being emotionally involved with the child care children resembles her relationship with her own children. Pleasure over the children's accomplishments, whether it is her own daughter's victory at a track meet, or a day care child's first step, is shared with similar enthusiasm.

For Judy, child care is like being at home and doing what a mother would naturally do. "Mainly the children come and we move through the day together. Sometimes they play inside and sometimes out in the yard. We'll go to town, go shopping, or have a picnic in the park. It's just like home; like when I was growing up; like when my kids were growing up. It's no different."

Cathy, one of the older women in the study and a provider for 16 years, calls herself a babysitter even though she does not think that necessarily describes what she does. "I guess I really think of myself as a substitute mom. As the years go on, maybe I should think of myself as a substitute grandma." The phrase "watching children" was used frequently as she spoke of her 18 years in family day care. Her responsibilities now resemble those she had when her own three children, ages 16, 18, and 22, were growing up. Her job, according to her definition, is "to work out nap schedules, make certain that children feel loved and secure, that they have feelings of self-importance and know they have a place."

She made it clear that parents like what she provides and that the nurturing, mothering type of care is what children need. Some of the thinking that seems to accompany a stronger teacher orientation, like planning activities, is not part of her

perceived responsibility. "I don't know what you are thinking about when you say planning since because I have mostly littler kids, I don't plan activities. The children play with each other and with some toys but I don't schedule activities." The children in her care range in age from 2 to 4 years.

For these two women, their child care work is an extension of mothering and like many women, caregiving and mothering are central to their perceptions of self. The ways in which they saw themselves were influenced by the more traditional view of women as mother and homemaker. As they moved into family day care (a position which did not require changes in activities or location and did not require specific training) they carried along perceptions of themselves in terms of roles. These were influenced by general self-concepts as women and were operationalized in their caregiving practices.

Judy, Cathy and other women in this study whose work related self-concepts included a strong mother image went about providing child care services that included unstructured, informal activities. Children played freely in an atmosphere in which physical care and nurturance were emphasized and household chores were accomplished. They believed that they met the needs of children and that parents were satisfied and comfortable with the child care their children received. They expressed satisfaction and fulfillment in their roles and did not convey ambiguity or ambivalence in discussing their work or their relationships with children or parents.

Debra, however, did not express clarity about her work related self-concept. Like Judy and Cathy, Debra is also a parent, having raised six children. A divorcee, she lives at home with two of her children, one in junior high and another in high school. In her day care work, she sees herself both as a mother and as a teacher, stating that "naturally you have to be a mother when they (the day care children) are here." But she quickly added that her primary reason for getting into family day care six years ago was to teach. She was trained as a teacher and would like to see her role in day care as primarily a teaching one. "I

decided to go into day care with the idea that I would start teaching. By teaching, I mean I would prefer to have a little preschool in my home." She found that this is difficult in her present situation. Even though she felt that she had the training and experience to be able to teach,(she had taught in public and parochial schools), she found that since she is the only person doing the work, "having to fix meals and do all the other things", she can't teach like she would like. "You can teach as a mother can but you can't have a preschool." Being placed in a position of trying to assume multiple roles, Debra chose the mother's role. Although she expressed a regard for her teaching skills and indicated little problem in seeing herself in that role, she found it difficult to balance the perceived educational needs of children and the overwhelming tasks of providing physical care and nurturance while maintaining the housekeeping chores.

Two of the distinctions discussed by Katz (1980) are relevant to the dilemma that Debra faced. Defining attachment (for purposes of her article) as "the capacity to be aroused to a wide range of behaviors and intense feelings by the status and behavior of the other", Katz includes in her definition the caring, loving emotions, the feelings of pride and joy and the feelings of fear, anxiety, anger and rage (p. 52). Debra demonstrated strong emotional attachment of the caring, loving kind. She has had the same children in care from infancy up to kindergarten age and spoke of her devotion to and concern for the children. She described an incident when the mother of a child in her care called in the middle of the night, distraught over the fact that her husband had kicked her out and she had no place to go. Debra explained that she had no choice but to let them stay with her. "The child was like my own, and I really care about him. I couldn't let him be out on the streets," she added.

It is accurate to say that her feelings toward the child care children also included feelings of anxiety and fear, manifestations of attachment according to Katz (1980, p. 52). On one occasion, when Debra and I were walking with the children, a two-year-old boy darted toward the street. Debra immediately

thrust the infant she was carrying into my arms and dashed after the child. After retrieving him, she shared her fears and concerns. Visibly shaken, she added, "I have nightmares over what could happen to some of my children."

The concept of mother played a significant role in Debra's perception of herself in terms of work. This is demonstrated in her discussions about her work and in the caregiving behaviors. Given this factor, it would appear difficult for Debra to achieve optimum detachment, a dimension which contributes to an effective teacher/child relationship (Katz, 1980, p. 53). The dimension of attachment, which can influence objectivity, burn-out, and evaluations has implications for caregivers who wish to fill a teaching function in their practice.

Another distinction between mothers and teachers, as described by Katz (1980), is the degree of spontaneity which characterizes adult/child relationships. Mothers, according to Katz, should be spontaneous whereas teachers go about their work in a more intentional manner. Clearly the perceptions of teaching held by Debra included the delivery of planned, organized instruction and activities, designed to reach certain goals. She purposefully asked me to come on a particular day so I could "see that she really does have a little preschool." I watched and listened as she called the six children, ages 18 months to 4 years, to the table. She gave each child (including the toddler who was in a highchair) a sheet from an activity book, explained how they were supposed to draw a line from the frog to the lily pad, and walked around the table, offering help when necessary. This was followed by a cut and paste activity which the children were asked to complete before they left the table to play. When we had a chance to talk about the morning, she apologetically explained that the children didn't act like she would like. But, she added, "You couldn't expect more since they don't really get to have the school part very often."

It is difficult for Debra to integrate the teaching and mothering roles into her concept of self and put these into practice. She is working in her home, where mothering is her

natural role and housekeeping is a large responsibility. She is deeply attached to the children and committed to their well-being. Providing physical care and nurturance and being warm and responsive and sensitive to the needs of the children consume a large portion of her time, energy and emotion. This leaves a lesser amount of time to work on intellectual development and school skills--those aspects of development that would, according to Debra, result from her teaching. As a family day care provider, Debra was struggling with the conflicting self-concepts and how they could be enacted. She demonstrated ambivalence, both in her conversations and in her caregiving practices, and stated that she was beginning to believe that it was impossible to be a family day care provider and have a little preschool at the same time--one could not be a teacher and a mother.

Jeannie is a provider who sees her role as a mother and the owner and administrator of a business. She described family day care as a "personal, intimate thing. You are raising someone's child, you know. I feel like I am a mother to these children. Literally, I am more of a mother to some than they've ever had."

For Jeannie, child care work is in some ways synonymous with mothering and her concept of self in terms of work includes a strong mothering image. She is the one provider among the group of 10 who has not had children. She indicated that she feels something is lacking because she "doesn't have babies of her own like other mothers do." She acknowledged that by being a mother to the children in her care she tried to fill a perceived void in her own life. This void, related to the lack of love in her life was revealed in her dialogue about her childhood.

> I'm an adult child of an alcoholic. Daddy did a lot of that when I was growing up. And my mother was, uh, sticking up for him all the time. I guess as a result, it's the way I am now, you know. I think that perhaps there were different needs in my life that weren't getting met. There was a lot of bitterness and distrust. And then there was a divorce and so consequently there's been a need for just being loved

I guess. And in my heart all my life I've not really genuinely known what it was like to be just loved, big time.

Noticeably affectionate with the children, she consistently sought and received physical contact in form of hugs, kisses, holding and tickling. She sang about and talked about love and in her words regularly "loved-up" on the children. Having her own child care business for the last three years gave her an outlet for the love she "always had to share"--and it was a source of the love she felt she never received.

For Jeannie, it was important that the children have the freedom to "run in and out of the house as they pleased." She saw herself and the children as a "wonderful family unit," not "big-time education." Her child care, according to her own definition, is like things should be in a child's home where the mother spends some time in the kitchen, some time cleaning and a lot of time playing with and doing things for the children.

Her perceptions of self as a business person were evident during the initial observation and interview. She described her day care as "her business and her career. I put a label on it as a business. I have cards and policies all typed up and I give them to anyone who asks about my child care. This way my clientele cannot abuse it."

Her strong perception of her day care as a business influenced the position Jeannie took when she decided to get out of family day care. She first tried to "sell the business," advertising it in the newspaper and discussing the sale with interested individuals and with administrators of several child care centers. What she discovered was that she was trying to sell a group of children she "deeply loved as a mother would" and that this just "wasn't right." After giving the parents plenty of time to find other places for their children and "even going so far as checking on some day care centers for them, I closed the doors of my child care business."

Jeannie perceived herself as a mother and a business person and tried to combine these roles as she delivered child care.

Functioning as a mother, she had opportunities to give and receive love, elements which were missing in her childhood. She hoped that by being a business person and having a career, she would achieve status and professionalism. She stated, however, that her clientele did not really think of her as a professional and that they did not treat her like one. Although she said she got out of the business so that she could "blossom" in other areas and have more time to do this, it is likely that ambivalence was also a factor. Seeing her work as a business and herself as an administrator while trying to function as a mother's was too difficult.

Whereas Jeannie perceived herself as a mother and business person and tried to blend the two roles, Carrie and Lois had work related self-concepts which combined teacher, mother, and business person. Both women, over the course of the study, increased the number of children in their care and changed to group home status (up to 12 children at one time).

Lois had been a family day care provider for 18 months before deciding to increase the number of children in care and become a group home. Since becoming a provider she has considered her service a business. She adopted policies that govern her business practices and created visible evidence that she offers a service for a fee and intends to promote it as such. There are three signs (in the yard or on the house) that identify her child care business and printed schedules and policies are just inside the door. She presents her business to parents as "more than just a child care where you watch TV or play in the bedroom and end up fighting. We have learning time, outside time, and quiet time."

In trying to include an educational emphasis and act as a teacher, she relied heavily on packaged curricula. During "learning time" she followed practices she had observed in a preschool in her church. She had ordered activity kits and used these every day. "Learning time" consisted of doing an activity, but also included calendar time, an occasional song or story, the Weekly Reader and some time to draw. Lois assumed an instructional role, moving around the table telling the children

what to do and helping them do it. She made sure that the children's names were on their papers and projects and that they took them home every day, "so that the parents would know that they did something." These, according to Lois, are things a preschool teacher does.

As a mother, Lois would try to do things she thinks mothers do; show love and provide for the child's physical needs. "I'm their part-time mom. In fact, one of the little girls even calls me mom and her real mom, mommie." In trying to fill the mothering role, she found it difficult to balance the demands of her own two children and those of the day care children. One of her sons, age 2, is at home throughout the day and the other son, 5 years, goes to kindergarten in the morning and is at home in the afternoon. Lois said that her own sons had to come first and sometimes she felt she wasn't giving them what they needed. "But the other children are here too and their parents are paying for their care. It's hard to do it all."

Lois indicated that she was not completely comfortable in any of the three roles. She stated that she would like to hire a teacher, and ultimately did, indicating feelings of inadequacy in terms of assuming a teaching role. "I never really learned how to be a teacher and believe me, doing an art project with seven kids is no easy matter." In discussing the mothering role, she said "I was never baby, baby, baby like some mothers are." She did admit that she was somewhat surprised that she "sort of liked it when the children thought of her as their mom" and that she might even decide to take younger children so that "she could start out early with them." She expressed ambivalence toward the business person's role as well when she said, "It's hard to open your front door like you're opening the door of your business--when it's really your home."

Lois' self-concepts influenced the role perceptions which evolved when she became a family day care provider. She perceived that her clientele expected her to be a teacher, a role for which she felt unprepared. Trying to assume the mother and business person role was also difficult as these were in conflict with self

concept and with notions of the functions of one's home. Lois, however, acted upon the conflict and strain and moved into group day care.

Carrie, a provider for three and one-half years, stated clearly that she has "a fascination with business" and is not embarrassed to say so. "Child care is a business and if I'm in it I want to be successful. This should be treated as a business no matter where it takes place." She sees herself as a manager similar to the director of a child care center. She is there every morning "to open up " and greet the children after their parents have "punched in" on their time cards. She makes sure that she interacts with the parents every day, maintaining that this is necessary if she is going to keep clients.

The structure of the day and the experiences that are planned for children are patterned after those which Carrie believes to be prevalent in a preschool. Divided into small groups according to age, the children follow a planned schedule which includes regular "school time." The curriculum is taken from a church based program and consists primarily of written activities found in workbooks. Carrie had hired a teacher to instruct and supervise children, using the prepared curriculum. Although she no longer functions as a teacher, she is in and out of the area where the children are, talking with them, helping them with their work sheets, occasionally holding a child, and sometimes doing a task like wiping off the tables.

The direction that Carrie has taken in her child care business contradicts the positions she espouses. She emphasized the importance of a home-like setting, of family unity and the mother's role, pointing out that she has a long history of mothering and caregiving. "I'm a mother at heart." As the oldest of four children, she was "like a mom to all of her siblings. My mother always worked out and I remember when I was seven years old knowing how to cook dinner--a full dinner!" When she was 10 years old, she started "working out in people's homes. I would go and stay with mothers who were going to have babies. I would cook, clean, and take care of children." Providing consistent and

loving care "like good mothers do" is, according to Carrie, the most important element of her business. She has taken herself out of the role of teacher and mother and moved more toward acting as an administrator. This has created strain, given her beliefs about the needs of children and the importance of the mother's role. She stated that children in child care were "robbed" of a mother's attention and love. The choices that Carrie made meant fewer opportunities to be involved in the intimate caregiving relationships that are characteristic of mothering and a different kind of care for the children.

As the providers spoke of their work and went about delivering child care, their perceptions of themselves were revealed in their language and could be inferred from their behaviors. A majority of providers expressed concepts that included different feelings and perceptions and in addition, showed ambivalence toward their roles and strain and conflict as they tried to assume multiple roles. For purposes of analysis, role perceptions were organized into categories of mother, teacher and business person. Although there are certain limitations inherent in using self reporting and observation, nevertheless, an examination of self-concepts, although gleaned through naturalistic methods of inquiry, contributes to an understanding of the providers and their ways of caring for children. In the following section, I will reflect upon some of these discoveries and discuss their implications for the design and implementation of support services for these women.

Reflections and Implications

Providers in this study whose role concepts were strongly influenced by their identity as a mother went about their work making decisions with a minimum of conflict in terms of activities. Their approaches to child care emphasized an informal, home-like environment with the children playing freely and participating in household routines. There were few structured, adult-guided activities. Perceiving their ways of caregiving as more than adequate, they believed that children in

their care were thriving and that parents of the day care children appreciated their services. The need to teach the children academic skills or prepare children for future educational experiences - goals expressed by other providers who tried to perceive themselves as teachers - were not part of their perceived responsibility. Their families of origin and present families valued and supported the role which the women assumed and the work which these women were doing. Judy and Cathy, by caring for children in the home, were able to continue to function as mothers and maintain self-images that were satisfying. Defining their work within the parameters of mothering was congruent with their concepts of self. They saw themselves as experienced, trained, competent and from their points of view, worthy of being a member of the child care profession. In short, their concepts of self in terms of work were clear,strong and without major conflict and their chosen work was meaningful and satisfying.

Educators and human service professionals interested in the development and well-being of children must ask if the type of child care these women provide is of high quality and whether children are thriving in these environments. The answer is a complex one and not the major focus of the paper. It is important to note, however, that the children in Judy's and Cathy's care seemed to move in and out of play situations. They chose from an array of toys, books, paper and crayons, puzzles, blocks and legos. In an informal, home-like setting, they appeared to be learning how to interact with other children and adults and how to play independently as the provider went about her chores. There was casual and regular interaction with the providers, who were attentive yet not directive in terms of presenting and guiding certain activities. The point to be made is that the women felt good about the work they were doing. It had a positive impact on their over-all self-concepts and they were comfortable and confident in the roles they had chosen.

The providers who tried to actualize a mother/teacher concept struggled with the dual identity and with how these two roles would be implemented. As mentioned previously, issues of

attachment and spontaneity could have contributed to the dilemma and the dissatisfaction. Research conducted by Colbert and Enos (1975) sheds further light on the issue of self-concept and child care work. Working with the notion of occupational self-concept, they examined the character of family day care homes. They assessed the impact of home day care providers on the children in their care and studied the relationships between self-concept and the delivery of child care. Included in their definition of occupational self-concept is "the set of feelings, attitudes and beliefs which comprise one's total view of the self in the occupational role" (Colbert & Enos, p.4). The researchers assumed that this view would affect the provider's work behavior.

Colbert & Enos (1975) found that the degree to which a provider incorporated an educational and professional view of her work into self-concept, the more likely she would engage in what the authors termed a "teaching-learning" approach. "A teaching-learning approach was indicated by the variety and type of stimulus materials used, quality and quantity of verbal interactions with children. . . and an environment which approximated what can generally be described as a learning environment" (Colbert & Enos, p.6).

Data gathered in this study would suggest that conflict and strain is experienced by some providers who try to incorporate a teaching image into their role perceptions and provide a so-called learning environment. With the exception of Judy and Cathy, women in the study expressed doubt, conflict, and ambivalence as they spoke of their roles and tried to integrate teaching into their caregiving practices. A possible response to this dilemma would be to instruct providers in certain teaching methods and promote the use of certain materials and objects. This had not been done for these women. Instruction in teaching methodology, however, does not necessarily facilitate change in perception of role or understanding of caregiving practices. Nor does it reduce the conflict that can result when multiple roles become the expectation of others or of the providers themselves. Facilitating lasting change in the delivery of child care in

family day care homes will require acknowledgement of providers' ways of perceiving themselves and their interpretations of their caregiving practices. It will also require attention to the complexity of assuming different roles in the family day care setting. It is important to keep in mind that some providers believe that mothering is what they can do best and what children need most. Fulfilling a mothering role is a major source of self-esteem. To be asked to de-emphasize this component could imply a devaluing of who they are and what they do.

The general attitude toward early childhood education is a critical element in any attempt to work with family day care providers who have self-concepts of mother and are trying to incorporate a teaching component. The women discussed in this paper had certain ideas about mothering and education long before they became providers. Carrie saw education as "something out there". If children were to be educated in her child care program, they must do work sheets, learn to raise their hands when they want to speak, and sit through circle time and listen. Debra felt that she could teach as a mother does but not as a teacher. Jeannie, in describing her family day care as a family unit, not "big time education", was indicating a distinction between what she thought children did at home and what they would do if they were being educated. She chose to emphasize one rather than the other. If education could be viewed as a fundamental part of caregiving, occurring in natural, spontaneous ways as adults live with children, then perhaps providers could move more easily into the role of educator and perceive themselves comfortably in this role. If, on the other hand, teaching is seen as instructing, getting across concepts, leading group activities, or trying to teach children to read and count, then it is likely quite different from the providers' perceptions of mothering and something that is more difficult for them to do and feel competent and satisfied in doing..

Understanding the distinctions which Katz (1980) makes could help in the support of caregivers who experience conflict and ambivalence in their work roles. Child care does not have to

choose between a service which provides warmth, responsiveness and physical care (behaviors commonly believed to be within the mothering domain) or one which promotes learning. Nor do providers need to feel that they cannot facilitate certain kinds of learning while engaging in mothering behaviors or they cannot mother if they try to promote learning. The important functions of the two roles as they are traditionally perceived must be offered to children, but the success of the offering rests with providers who feel good about themselves and their work. Claesson and Brice (1989) in their study of early childhood teachers who are also mothers found that the two roles could be complementary, even though ambiguity could also exist. Understanding the "complimentary of functions" (Katz, p. 61) could also lead to greater satisfaction, fulfillment and integration on the part of providers and less ambivalence toward their work.

Providers like Carrie and Lois found it less difficult to assume the role of administrator than that of teacher. But they also experienced conflict when they tried to turn their services into businesses. Caring for children in the home environment is natural--making home day care into a business is not. Both of these providers, and Jeannie as well, hoped to achieve professional status by becoming the operator of a business. They were not able to see themselves as professionals and were convinced that world did not see them in this light either. In their cases, the expectations of self were unrealistic given societal attitudes toward child care and the status of child care as a profession.

Achieving professional status as a child care worker is much more complex than labeling the service a business, adding business cards and advertising it as such. The professionalization of child care is an issue which has attracted considerable interest (Joffe, 1977; Silin, 1985). Joffe characterized early childhood education as a weak or marginal profession. Although child care does have some professional attributes, e.g., affiliation with universities for training purposes, active organizations, and a split between those who practice the profession and those who

engage in research and theory development, it does not have a clear mandate or license to control the service (Joffe, p.22). If a woman believes that professional status is desirable, is it possible to achieve this by either making the service more like a business or incorporating educational activities? The answer is likely no. By adding the outward trappings of a business, providers are not actually changing the undefined, non-technical knowledge base nor are they strengthening their position in terms of controlling the service. The chances of controlling the service are perhaps more likely if a provider emphasizes a teaching role rather than a mothering role, given the fact that child care is often seen as a threat to parental authority (Joffe, p.22) But achieving professional status, given the place of work, the nature of the work, the education and training of providers, the lack of a clearly defined, common knowledge base, and societal attitudes toward caregiving will be difficult.

This paper focused on family day care providers and their perceptions of themselves in terms of their work. As participants in the study, they had the opportunity to reflect upon their histories, their value structures, present situations and their self-concepts. They valued the process as an opportunity to examine their work lives and beliefs and to try to clarify their expectations and those of their clientele. They are the ones caring for children day in and day out and it is their definitions of self and of reality that we must consider as we try to support them and this viable form of child care. As these women build a work life for themselves--one they can feel good about and one which is good for children--they must respond to factors which influence their role definitions and certainly ones which influence their over-all self concepts. It is the responsibility of educators and human service professionals to try to understand family day care providers and then respond to these women as they really are, in ways that show respect and acceptance and evoke encouragement and feelings of self-worth.

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